

9 MAY 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable William P. Bundy
Assistant Secretary for East Asian and
Pacific Affairs
Department of State

SUBJECT : Comments on 8 May 1967 Draft Paper, "Bombing
Options for the Rest of 1967"

1. Per your request, we have reviewed the intelligence judgments contained in your 8 May draft. We find ourselves in substantial agreement with these judgments, but offer the supplementary comments below for your consideration.

2. Chinese Attitudes

a. We agree that the Communist Chinese "might intervene militarily on a major scale if they concluded, on their reading of our actions, that we were in fact aiming to destroy North Vietnam or eliminate the Communist regime." We also feel that the Chinese would almost certainly intervene if they considered their borders or territorial integrity threatened. This consideration would not be likely to come into play unless a ground invasion of North Vietnam were mounted and, hence, is not directly germane to an analysis of bombing strategies. A vigorous pursuit of your Option A which raised the sanctuary issue, however, would markedly increase Chinese concern and increase the likelihood of the Chinese considering themselves territorially threatened.

SECRET/

25X1

SECRET/

b. The Chinese leverage issue is a tricky one that needs to be kept in proper perspective. The Chinese want the North Vietnamese to continue the war and the armed struggle against the United States. The Chinese are able to supply -- or make possible the supply -- of the material resources the North Vietnamese need to continue. If Chinese policy should change radically to the point where the Chinese wanted North Vietnam to desist, the Chinese would have tremendous leverage, since they could curtail or arrest the supply flow. This leverage, however, does not work both ways. Even if the Chinese want the North Vietnamese to persist (as now seems to be the case), the Chinese cannot really force the North Vietnamese to continue. (The threat of withholding supplies to prevent adoption of a policy that would make those supplies unnecessary is not a very potent threat.) Thus, we are inclined to doubt that the Chinese could compel Hanoi to continue a struggle Hanoi wanted to stop. Hanoi, in short, probably has more independent latitude for decision-making than is sometimes recognized. The choice to continue probably is (and will remain) more Hanoi's than Peiping's. We agree that concern in Hanoi over China's internal stability could exert considerable influence over the Lao Dong's strategic thinking, not because China's "leverage" would be reduced but because the Lao Dong might worry about the continued dependability of the supply lines essential to its present strategy.

3. Soviet Attitudes: While we do not disagree with your judgment that "the Soviets on balance would like to see the Viet-Nam conflict settled," we feel this is slightly too compressed a summary assessment of a complex issue and, hence, a formulation open to misinterpretation. As indicated and discussed in SNIE 11-11-67, there is a wide area of ambivalence and uncertainty in the USSR's attitude toward the Vietnam war. As the estimate says:

"The Soviets surely see the war as advantageous to them in many ways ... On the other hand, the conflict, as seen from Moscow, has its adverse aspects as well."

We are inclined to the view that, on balance, Moscow probably feels a continuation of the Vietnam struggle in its present form involves more risk than profit for

SECRET/

25X1

SECRET

25X1

Soviet interests. In this sense, the Soviets would probably like to see the conflict settled. But settlement per se is probably not a major Soviet objective, certainly not settlement at any price. The Soviets can ill afford -- and will not let themselves be -- put in a position where they are vulnerable to the charge of selling out a fraternal Socialist state under attack by the imperialist aggressors. Thus, from the fact that the Soviets would probably like to see the conflict settled, we should not draw the erroneous inference that the Soviets would be honest brokers in a disinterested quest for peace.

4. North Vietnamese Attitudes

a. Hanoi's assessment of overall progress in South Vietnam will certainly be (as you indicate) a key determinant of the Lao Dong's strategic decisions. We do not believe, however, that it will necessarily be the key determinant.

b. Equally important (in our view) is another consideration which you also discuss, namely, Hanoi's assessment (which of itself will be a political fact, whether or not in our eyes the assessment is accurate) of the political impact of domestic (i. e., US) and international opposition to US continuation of the struggle. Here, as we all recognize, the North Vietnamese leadership's thinking is influenced by the lessons that leadership draws from the Franco-Viet Minh war and the related belief that France had to cease fighting when the struggle became a politically unsaleable commodity in Paris.

c. Finally, Hanoi's strategic decisions will be determined by cost considerations which our bombing program can influence appreciably. There is probably no single threshold level of cost beyond which Hanoi will not go, hence, no single target-mix that will force Hanoi out of the war. However, Hanoi's thinking will be significantly influenced if it leads to a recognition that a struggle of indefinite duration is in prospect during which North Vietnam will be compelled to pay a continuing price on its own territory.

15/

O/DCI/SAVA:GACarver:mee 9May67 Richard Helms

Orig & 1 - Mr. Bundy

Director

1 - DCI Audit Project file

1 - GAC Chrono

SECRET

25X1